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1 July 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant Director for Research and Reports  
THROUGH: Chief, Economic Research, ORR  
SUBJECT: Language Development Program  
REFERENCE: CIA Regulation 25-115  
CIA Notice 25-115-2

1. CIA Regulation 25-115, dated 4 February 1957, first established the CIA Language Development Program. Since this regulation was issued, certain additional steps have been taken to implement the language program, including the scheduling of language tests. A sizeable number of D/M analysts have become disillusioned with the language program as a result of these tests, and with what seem to be good reasons. I am writing this memorandum because I think a serious problem has developed and would like to acquaint you with it.

2. CIA Notice 25-115-2 sets forth a schedule of awards for the development of language competence and gives instructions for qualifying. An essential part of the procedure was the completion of Form No. 444c by each employee. This form calls for the employee to make a subjective evaluation of his ability to read, write, pronounce, speak, and understand a foreign language. On the portion of the form covering reading, the employee was asked to choose among five levels of ability, four of which dealt with either or both (1) reading "in fields I am familiar with", (2) the frequency of need to use a dictionary. Each of the other language skills had similar grading scales.

3. A series of tests designed to measure the current level of language proficiency of employees claiming proficiency has been partly completed. The tests have revealed the following serious difficulties with the Language Development Program:

A. Many employees discovered that they had misinterpreted the meaning of the statements included in Form 444c. For example, in at least one case, a person with intermediate reading knowledge selected entry 2, "I can read texts of most grades of difficulty, of a general nature or in fields I am familiar with, using the dictionary occasionally", in the belief that this described his

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level of competence. As it turned out, this statement was intended by OTR to describe an advanced level of competence, and in order to reach this standard on the test, the individual had to perform at higher than the intermediate level. The employee, when he filled out the form, was not told that this statement described advanced competence. I do not believe it was unreasonable for him to have concluded that it described intermediate competence. Another analyst claimed competence at level 3. Subsequently, he took a Russian course, and then the test, on which he rated only level 2. Clearly, this analyst had not retrogressed; his subjective interpretation of the meaning of level 3 simply did not match that of OTR.

B. Since each individual filled out his own form ~~444c~~ on a subjective basis, there was no guarantee of uniformity of interpretation from person to person. Thus, in addition to the problem created for a given person as described immediately above, there was a problem of comparability among all those who filled out the form. As it turned out, there was every incentive for an individual to rate himself as low as possible in order that it would be easier to win an achievement award.

C. With respect to the reading test, employees were not given an opportunity to use a dictionary, in spite of the fact that four of the statements on Form ~~444c~~ took the use of a dictionary into account. Also, the two top statements on the reading portion of the form gave the employee an alternative -- he could claim to be able to read texts of most grades of difficulty "of a general nature or in fields I am familiar with" (emphasis supplied). The tests, however, were not in fields the individual was familiar with. Indeed, most if not all the reading material was from literary sources, and often contained rather obscure and seldom used words. Hence, the reading tests: (1) did not permit use of a dictionary, (2) did not give the individual a chance to show what he could do in fields he was familiar with, (3) used literary material which was apparently neither a fair nor a meaningful test of reading knowledge.

4. In summary, the criticisms have been largely about the reading portion of the test. The basis upon which our employees evaluated their ability to read the language and the basis upon which their proficiency was tested are not the same. Hence, a comparison of the self-evaluation and the test results for the purpose of determining a change in the level of proficiency or the maintenance of a claimed level of proficiency is hardly valid, and awards granted on the basis of such a comparison scarcely equitable.

5. Attached <sup>as</sup> ~~are~~ Exhibits A through D are four comments on the Language Development Program, which I solicited from four members of

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the Division. I believe that the views expressed here are rather generally held, and illustrate nicely some of the problems that have arisen.

6. I believe that the complaints expressed by our analysts are well founded and are deserving of attention at the high<sup>est</sup> levels. I would either recommend that employees be given an opportunity to demonstrate their reading ability in fields they are familiar with while using a dictionary, or that some of the obvious inequities in the program to date be corrected by administrative action to be applied retroactively.

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